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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

In Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

Transitions

By

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April, 2008

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## THE PROPOSAL

My thesis body of work is, through the utilization of my experiences as a carpenter and working in the context of being an artist, autobiographical in nature.

Initially, I proposed investigating and making a body of work that dealt with personal relationships and the dialog that exists between intimate partners. These associations revolved around the human affairs and experiences that had occurred in my own personal life. It was through observation and personal involvement that I would create this dialog. I wanted this work to communicate a sense of presence, of encounter along with a perspicacity of the private, almost spiritual, exchange of its elements. Through this body of work I sought to reflect a sense of vulnerability juxtaposed with resilience.

Eventually, I came to the conclusion that my investigations focused on a context that only redefined my immediate experiences and did not fully explore how I could consciously incorporate my skills as a carpenter into my work as an artist. My marriage, family and proximate environment were the narrators of any resolutions my work came to. I felt the context of my work needed to be much more than the matter of my immediate circumstances alone.

The resulting revision was about an autobiographical approach to making work that utilized my practical experiences with a variety of materials and processes while still operating in the context of being an artist. It is about embracing my history of carpentry, tools and materials and how, as an artist, I tapped into this knowledge to formulate and make the thesis body of work.



The most relevant change in the proposal was the introduction of the arch. I felt that the arch was a form symbolic of my architectural background and of being an artist. It references a basic yet dynamic element of structural design and corresponds with the metaphorical content. The arch created a format in which I could combine material skills along with the formal considerations I make as an artist. Through this format the thesis body of work would reflect my sensitivity and sensibilities both as an artist and as a carpenter. The arch would function as an armature in which the external surface could be manipulated to correspond with a sequential order. That order consisted of presenting a series of similar forms that through a variation of shape, scale, surface and color would allude to a transition from one place or segment of time to another. This format would incorporate a range of materials and processes that were directly connected to my past.

I was interested in formulating a body of work in which the individual elements would collectively create a stronger whole. I wanted to explore the possibilities of articulating both space and volume through the use of one element, the arch. The process of constructing individual forms that collectively create a whole along with the order or presentation functioning to unify the individuals was the springboard for my thesis body of work.

Finally, this was an investigation into how I could dovetail together my carpentry skills, knowledge and experiences along with being an artist into a methodology. I felt that employing my skills and knowledge would lead to a process that would facilitate the building of large scale forms within a short period of time. Additionally, the materials and methods used would have to be outside the existing parameters of working in fired ceramic materials. I felt this was going to be an intuitive approach and that my skills and

background would support both the content of the work and the technical

experimentation. As an artist, I felt that it was possible to become intimately involved with the process of making and the logic of materials.

## INTRODUCTION

“Every man’s work, whether it be literature, or music, or pictures, or architecture, or anything else, is always a portrait of himself.”

Samuel Butler (1612-1680)

Some of my fondest recollections are about tools, materials and the people and places I came to associate these things with. My abilities are rooted in being taught to be self-sufficient and to have a quiet/calm sense of self-confidence. Investigation and experimentation has been, and is, the primary dialog I employ to explore both the physical and natural environment around me. Associations, abilities and dialog are what connect me to my work as an artist.

I have always collected tools and objects that have some quality of personal or historical order. The intrinsic value of these things is the associations they evoke in me. Somehow these things feel as if they are tangible extensions of my own identity. I identify these objects and tools with process, with taking apart or making. Indeed, early in my life I was compelled to learn about tools so that I could further explore and investigate. My father and grandfathers were skilled carpenters. Throughout my life they taught me how to be a diverse craftsman along with a respect for the tools of the trade. I still find myself enticed by tools, materials and processes that engage this prior knowledge. This dialog has been consistent throughout most of my life and one that I feel is more relevant to being an artist. These experiences are what I am interested in tapping into to make sculpture.

My background in carpentry developed my sense of touch, of using my hands, but I felt a need for a more intellectual connection with my skills. This led me to college to



study civil technology. I gravitated towards science and math and found it a formative experience in which I evolved into being a logical thinker. Knowledge (logic, math, science) and its application shaped how I think and operate as an artist. This is how I came to employ a logical approach to finding solutions along with a familiarity of a range of tools, materials and processes to make sculpture and operate as an artist.

Another familiarity that is relevant deals with natural experiences. Living out west, in Arizona and Colorado, my interest and surveys of the geological formations in the desert and mountains had a resonant impact on my sensibilities. The changes and shifts of color in the terra, the diversity of surface and texture combined with the alternating moods of atmospheric phenomena shaped the conscious and unconscious recollections that influence how I observe and respond to my own work. These recollections directly influenced how I was going to solve aspects of the thesis work, specifically, incorporating the use of adobe.

In addition to the desert and the mountain landscapes, my experiences as a sailor had a significant influence on the work I was making during the first year of graduate school. Navigation and its related terms (course, direction, speed, etc.) became metaphors for my work. Markers, waypoints and buoys corresponded with the connections I had with time, place and of self. I was interested in the correlations that the nautical had with my own observations. I wanted my work as an artist to explore this relationship. Reflecting back through the first year of graduate school, I found these investigations and the resulting body of work to be more a contextual operation that centered on being infatuated with the nautical.

Consequently, in the second year of graduate school a shift in both my work and my reasoning occurred. I needed to acknowledge the strata of experiences and influences in my life and how, in the context of being an artist, I could tap into these assimilated and intuitive experiences to formulate the thesis body of work.

## HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

Process and materials, nature's order and its basic elements and the dynamics of balance all resonated with associations I had about the historical content and contemporary context of what formed my aesthetic as an artist. Reinvestigating some of these notions led me to some correlations I was not aware of. Thus research drew me into the natural, historical and contemporary influences that shaped and influenced the content and context of my experience.

## NATURAL ARCHES

Of particular interest to me are the naturally occurring geological formations known as Natural Arches, two being Rainbow Bridge and Landscape Arch in Arches National Park, Utah. Studying these formations I was aware of the recollections I had about the desert and mountains. The associations I have about color, surface, texture and form are embodied in the simplistic yet monumental presence they have.

Intuitively, I have an immediate apprehension that no human intervention created these formations, rather, natural mechanisms such as erosion, gravity, chemical and mechanical weathering and shifts in the earth's mantle are responsible. Accordingly, nature follows its own order, the breakdown and transition of the earth's geological elements. Logically, I understand the amount of time and the sequence of events that must occur in order to facilitate their existence. They evoke in me a sense of respect for the natural rhythms of nature. Through these logical observations and emotive responses I began to understand my own interpretation of nature and how the assimilation of these experiences influenced my aesthetic.



## ARCHITECTURE

Historically the arch has been a symbol of civilization. The Romans learned of the arch either from the Etruscans or the Hellenistic builders. As they acquired this knowledge they made it their own. Roman architecture was about shaping space around ritual. Ritual can be described as an activity, but to the Romans it also implied architecture.

The evolution of Roman architecture and their use of the arch was a direct response to how the Romans felt, thought and acted ritually. They appropriated the arch as a device for producing great uninterrupted volumes. The arch allowed Roman architects to deliberately shape space in relation to order and function. To the Romans the arch was a vehicle of structural and spatial invention. It was practical and symbolic. The Pantheon (c.118-25AD) has its place in monumental history as a true archetype, never to be equaled. It was not until the later half of the twentieth century, with the development of reinforced concrete, that the record held by the Pantheon was broken. The "Temple of Apollo" at Lake Averno (second century) is the second largest surviving arched dome from the Roman world. Studying the remains of this dome I was drawn most to what nature had done to it. Seismic activity, erosion and weathering had rendered it almost an organic or biomorphic structure. It was the breakdown and transition of this manmade structure into the basic geological elements that struck me as the most relevant connection I had with the making of the thesis body of work.

Also, I was interested in the speed with which Roman architects worked out the basic technology and construction of arches and domes. Their technical methods owed



almost nothing to past building practices. Their innovative approach to building with concrete was something they developed. Their new design and construction capabilities stemmed from their realization of the potential of the device. Roman architects had to invent a process that would accommodate the structural and spatial requirements of their evolving architecture. Throughout the making of the thesis work I saw my past experiences as the tools I had for being an artist. I needed to tap into this prior knowledge in order to facilitate the contextual, structural and spatial requirements of the arches I proposed for the thesis.

## CONTEMPORARY INFLUENCES

Just as the Romans' twentieth century architects found ways to manipulate materials into their realm of conceptualization. Eero Saarinen (1910-1961) was through material and design innovation able to expand on pure forms of allegory and allusion. His Gateway Arch (1948-1964), St. Louis, Missouri, synthesized the qualities of abstraction, monumentality and structural daring. The 630 foot tall stainless steel arch has no real structural skeleton; rather its inner and outer skin provide the support strength. His design tested all the current fabrication methods of the time and yet throughout all the technical processes he was still operating in the context of being an architect/sculptor. The Arch is metaphorical in its allusions, consciously symbolizing the idea of the gateway to the west while being one of the largest engineering feats of the time. Architecture, engineering and the materials used to facilitate fabrication have always interested the logical side to my thinking, yet it is through my work as an artist that I find a more intellectual connection with my skills.

Artist Martin Puryear (1941- ) struck just that cord in my thinking the moment I first saw his work. As a carpenter I saw work that demonstrated a consistent and masterful handling of wood and other materials. As an artist I saw work that addressed a variety of formal issues and a range of sculptural problems. His theoretical approach along with his vocabulary of materials, tools and processes effectively demonstrated for me Puryear's commitment to craft. Yet he recognized that craftsmanship alone does not yield art. He conceived craft as a means rather than an end; thus his sculpture is informed by the methods of craft. What interests me most about Puryear's work is the shift away from refinement, refinement that attention to craft can yield. Puryear does not abandon craft. His dexterity is less self-conscious because of the materials. Wire and tar are not as subservient to the hand as wood. His "ring series," wall mounted, bent wood sculptures, relate intimately to the human scale and their circular form suggest some form of symbolic reference, yet to Puryear these sculptures demonstrate a propensity towards eloquent form and craftsmanship. This level of refinement is evident in "Big and Little Same," 1981. The purest and most refined of these rings is Cerulean, 1982. Puryear eventually came to reject the purity and preciousness these sculptures had and saw the limited format these had for a sculptor. Endgame and Two into One, both 1985, demonstrate his movement towards more physical forms. As he sought to make his sculptures more vigorous he forced himself to vary the materials he used. He did have a commitment to natural materials but as he shifted away from refinement he began to use wire, wire mesh and tar. An important turning point in materials for Puryear is his relief sculpture made of wire titled "Greed's Trophy," 1984. It is strong and direct as it projects menacingly off the wall. His work in the round now included new materials.

Tar was applied to wire mesh as a surface and wood served as the underlying structural element. *Sactum*, 1985, is one of his earliest works to employ tar, a double-lobed structure that is composed of a patchwork of wire mesh collaged together then tarred. It is important because it suggests the possibility that a dynamic relationship exists between the interior and exterior. The tar and mesh is the key to this perception. It allows for a sense of mass and of being fragile. It appears thick and opaque but is really a thin veil. The tar surface allows the sculpture a roughness following its rugged outline. To me Puryear was able to free his work of excessive refinement without sacrificing the essence of the individual works. His conceptual interests are not in conflict with his passion for making. His propensity towards direct physical involvement with materials and process support his conceptual interests.

Additionally, Puryear's response to Minimalism was that he felt urged to work against it. Minimalism was cold, anonymous and lacked the artist's personal touch. That notion opened options for Puryear. While his work and thinking are about reducing things to some absolute core, they are also about a constant pursuit of what will give his work validity, some connection to a personal source.

What is important to me is that in finding ways to manipulate materials into their realm of conceptualization these architects and artists were able to transcend human intervention into the realm of sculpture, of art. These artists had concepts at some point in their career that were bigger than any current, established means of building. The most relevant observation I kept coming back to was that many had to invent new methodologies that tested all the supporting fabrication and material technologies of the time while still remaining in the context of being an artist. New technology, materials





## CONTENT

The seven arches are elemental, geometric forms presented as a whole in a proportional sequence.

The composition articulates space and volume with a series of similar shapes that change in scale and appearance yet remain within the parameters of the format. The whole exists as a product of the individual's collective association. The seven do not symbolize any other object than the arch itself. They are what they are, self-supporting structures that transition from one element to another. They evolve from the rough, organic surface of the first to the structural steel profile of the last with glass billets lining their inner curve. The methodology embraces all my historicity. There is evidence of a process of organization, a sense of order, of sequence and time. This order of elements functions to unify the seven into one.

Yet, the simplicity of their presence does not negate the complexity of their reference. The order, scale and sequence of the arches could still trigger connections, evoke associations and imply levels of meaning which are not obviously apparent. Their outward appearance does not conflict with one's contemplation. The solidity of the materials used demonstrates the arch's ability to support itself and free the viewer to contemplate its evolution. Utilizing my experiences as a carpenter and remaining in the context of being an artist, "Transitions" became autobiographical, revealing my history of working in a variety of mediums. Erwin Panofsky (Meaning in The Visual Arts, 1903) said it best: "Content is that which a work betrays but does not parade."

## SPATIAL REQUIREMENTS

It was still not clear to me just how I was going to approach bringing the proposal into the realm of physicality. In other words, I had not clearly defined what had to be resolved. I approached my thesis committee and they suggested I needed to define what my requirements were concerning space, scale and presentation. It was also suggested that I visit the Bevier Gallery and study the available space and develop specifics.

With the committee's advice and armed with several long, thin strips of wood and some fire bricks I went to the gallery. With these implements I was able to spring or tension a curve or an arch from floor to wall, floor to ceiling, floor to floor and wall to wall. In doing so I could get a sense of how this shape would affect its proximate environment and how it would activate space. This process caught me by surprise in that it was immediate and just about any curve was possible; but there was a problem. There were too many scenarios. The obvious, most logical solution and one that would fit within my intentions was to choose a wall. The west wall is uninterrupted by windows and close to thirty five feet in length. The ceiling is ten feet high and I wanted at least twelve feet from the wall in floor space. Roughly, I had about a ten by twelve by thirty-five foot space or volume to work with. The physical reality of the gallery had an impact on my ideas, and a more specific concept began to formulate.

It occurred to me that I could in fact build a small scale version of the gallery space by hot gluing two pieces of rigid foam panels to form a right angle. Then I carefully measured and marked ten points on the horizontal and corresponding vertical axis. It was a proportional sequence, for every two feet on the horizontal there was a decrease of one foot in the vertical, starting at eight feet and ending at two feet. Then I

bent wire to form a curve at each point resulting in ten curves. I even mention this because when it was built, at the moment of completion, I saw how a series of curves along one wall would articulate and activate space. It provided specific information about the spatial investigations I had done previously in the gallery space. The concept was now site-specific, not only in its presentation in the gallery, but in its fabrication. I felt it was crucial that all ten arches be made as a group in one space. In this way I could have a better sense of what the relationship was between any one individual and the whole. The nearest space available to work on this scale was the outdoor kiln room. It seemed a logical approach and indeed one that I was thankful for later on.



## MATERIALS AND METHODS

“Somebody said that it could not be done but he with a chuckle replied that ‘maybe it couldn’t’ but he would be one who wouldn’t say so till he tried.”

Edgar A Guest (1881-1959)

The bulk of my investigations and research for the thesis body of work concerned combining my experiences with a range of materials and methods along with the associations I have as an artist. I was interested in taking what I knew as a carpenter and formulating a method or process that fit within my context as an artist. A methodology that allowed me to consider the conceptual implications and would facilitate the building of large, lightweight, rigid arch forms in a concise period of time. While the thesis began to evolve so did the arch. Its evolution was a logical progression of solutions based on real evidence.

Early on, my technical experimentation focused on cast refractory cements and their inherent properties. They fit within my notion of ceramics in that they were primarily made of ceramic materials and could be fired. I felt the formulas for this range of materials could be altered or amended to suit my particular needs. Also, I was interested in its ability to behave much like concrete. It can be cast into just about any shape. Cement can be added, as a binder, to lend significant strength to both the green and fired form.

Using cast refractory cement is not anything new to ceramic artists but I felt my approach was different. Flexible plywood was used to bend the centering for the bottom of an arch. Then rigid plywood was fastened to the centering device. The resulting rectangular box was then lined with one inch rigid styrofoam. To this lining more rigid



foam was hot glued in place at specific locations to correspond with positive and negative surface changes. I began to cast iron, metal filings, glass and found objects into the arch forms. If after firing I found an arch to be unsuccessful I would cut it up with a diamond saw and recast the pieces into the next form. This recycling process was interesting to me in that I could fold previous ideas directly into the next evolution.

It was exciting but there was a certain chaos about the work. When fired the iron, glass and metal ran, bubbled and ate away at the cast refractory body. The resulting surfaces were dark and caustic looking. It appeared as if these forms were a product of some violent event, an event that scattered fragments of charred buildings around my studio space. I also discovered that even with considerable alterations to the cast refractory it was still quite heavy. I felt these investigations were valid and had potential but there existed inherent limitations. I also investigated industrial and commercial applications of cast refractory cement for lightweight material solutions. Luminite, Thermobond, Sparcast, Secar 71 and calcium aluminate cement were all possible candidates but have specific applications and design criteria. I had a familiarity with these materials and felt it was possible to go outside the technical parameters.

Eventually, time and cost eliminated commercial sources but it was valuable experience that would make a contribution throughout the remainder of the thesis work.

I also came to the conclusion that my investigations were too technical and thus limited my aesthetic choices. This led me to change the boundaries of the concept and find a process or parts of a process that more closely supported my ideas and my history. Tapping into my past experiences with adobe and other media seemed a simple solution

after all the experimentation, yet it gave me more options. As an artist I felt I could operate freely with this process, manipulate it to correspond with my ideas.

Sun dried bricks made of clay and straw, used to build dwellings in regions with little rainfall, is known as adobe. Adobe is basically clay and binder. If you add Portland cement to this mixture it is known as stabilized adobe. Using this material to make sculpture has some inherent problems. It needs some type of wire mesh to bond surface to the form; it is prone to cracking and can be heavy. On work this scale drying time could be lengthy and cracking is directly related to drying time. Once again I went to commercial applications for similar products. Stucco was a close relative but the end product is also heavy and has a limited capacity to accept coloration. Weaving my way through an almost endless list of manufacturers and suppliers I found Dryvitt Systems, a product used commercially to replicate stucco. It is polymer cement that when mixed with water has the viscosity of mortar. It adheres well to rigid foam on both vertical and horizontal applications. It can be applied thin and cures overnight. Rubber coated fiberglass mesh is embedded into the first coat to make it resistant to cracking. I felt this material was a suitable choice for making a lightweight yet strong stabilized adobe clay body.

The immediate challenge was the manufacturer's caution that it does not accept pigments well and in fact is usually painted over. When left to its own devices it dries to a drab gray green satin finish. I sensed I could alter this characteristic with ceramic materials. Indeed the first tests using Dryvitt as the binder in a stabilized adobe recipe were promising. I was able to manipulate the final color into a range of browns, rust and

yellows. I had moved away from cast refractory cement and the kiln, yet I still maintained an active dialog with ceramic materials and colorants.

Now I needed the armatures, curves that were strong enough to support their own weight and stable enough to work on. The first arch had a radius of eight feet. Again, cost and time eliminated most fabrication techniques at this scale but I was reminded of laminated wood beams I built as a carpenter. I felt my past was beginning to dovetail with my ideas about the thesis.

Two sheets of three quarter inch plywood were laid out on the floor. A layer of water resistant glue was rolled onto the surface. Two more sheets of plywood were laid perpendicular to the bottom sheets. Then all four sheets were screwed together and roughly two thousand pounds of bricks, clay and anything else heavy was equally spaced over its area and allowed to dry overnight. Next, a string with a pencil was attached at one corner and used to swing or draw ten curves with a radius starting at eight feet and decreasing to two feet sequentially in eight inch increments. The curves were cut out with a jig saw. These laminated plywood curves were one and a half inches thick and eight inches in depth. They were rigid, strong and lightweight for their size.

From there I went to the outdoor kiln room and began to layout the position and order of each arch. Using a length of twenty four feet I marked two feet up the wall and two feet out from the wall at one end. At the other end marks were made eight feet up and out. Using a chalk box I snapped a red line from each end. This process gave me an immediate sense of the volume this sculpture would occupy. The necessary reference points for mounting brackets could be calculated and recorded. It was important to factor



this in early on. It would make it possible to transfer and install the sculpture in the gallery quickly and would keep the arches stable and safe to work on.

Then each arch had to be wrapped or built up with rigid foam, sometimes six inches thick. Top to bottom, side to side had to have sufficient thickness so I could rasp into shape any profile I wanted. It was crucial that the finished shape of the foam be exactly as I wanted, as the adobe mix was going to be fairly thin and could not hide imperfections. Practical experience and intuition had gotten me to this point. I was now able to focus more on the aesthetic choices I needed to make concerning shape, form and color.

In terms of color, my strategy was to start with the largest one and gradually shift the colors as the arches moved down in scale. Any material used as a pigment had to be proportioned into the dry mix. Shifts in color would be possible by decreasing or increasing the percentages per batch. Thus they needed to be done in order so I could observe these shifts and proceed accordingly. Later on, as the polymer adobe cured a mixture of acrylic sealer, water resistant glue and water was sprayed over the surface of each arch. More pigments and ceramic materials were sifted into the wet glue and then sprayed again with sealer. The more I became familiar with these surfaces the more I came to acknowledge the associations that were influencing my choices.

Each time I started to cover an arch it had to be completed in that cycle so the batch was homogeneous in color. Just finishing the first arch within a twenty four hour period tested my physical abilities. It was difficult because they were big, out of reach at the top. It was crowded. Adding to the difficulties was my attempt to include the narrative into the first and largest arch. I embedded hundreds of sea shells in the bottom



stratum, then tools, then glass lenses, then buoys, clocks and all kinds of personal found objects. Knowing I could not stop until the arch was complete I began to realize this approach was going to be time consuming and soon I would deplete the objects I had selected. Another thought reluctantly percolated. I was amazed at number one's size and sheer presence but disappointed with the inclusions. They presented too much information and looked like some pasted on identity. The form of the arch was much more powerful in its own physicality. At this point I decided to eliminate the narrative inclusions and instead focus on the formal elements - form, surface, space and color.

Intuitively, I was relying on my experiences and sensibilities to guide me in the conscious decisions I needed to make about the work. I had done this before but now I was working in the context of being an artist. This is how I came to see each arch as a referential transition from the former context of the narrative to the more minimal, formal order that I was now operating with.

Paralleling my work on the thesis, investigations in glass led me to using ceramic materials, colorants and cement on hot, solid glass forms to create specific surfaces. The concept was to develop a variety of surfaces and colors that had associations with the natural, inherent qualities of stone and minerals and to include this process in the thesis work. I started to formulate a process that was somewhat outside the traditional practices of working in hot glass. I focused on making a series of elongated organic forms and specifically concentrated on how to manipulate surface and color with a variety of amended, low fire ceramic glazes. I felt it was important to go outside the thesis work and have some time to just freely explore possibilities in glass. Whether this was included or not in the final body of work was not fully resolved, but I did have intentions

of including a glass arch at the end of the sculpture. In fact we made several solid glass curves using the centering devices I had learned to construct for casting arches. The flexible plywood proved a good form to slump hot glass over to shape a curve. I was also making glass billets, formed and rolled hot, with copper wire, nails, brass filings and ceramic colorants as inclusions. These were then cut and ground to fit together inside a centering to form a solid curve. All the glass arches fit within the proportional sequence of the adobe arches.

Interestingly, as all the parts for the sculpture neared completion, I sensed the composition and order of the sculpture could still be altered, changed to correspond with what I felt the work was about now compared to what it was in the beginning. The entire concept, process of making and eventual conclusions had evolved away from the literal narrative and had become about how I see my past experiences as the tools I have for being an artist. Shying away from a more formal definition, I felt my thesis work had become simplified, minimal, and elemental and yet in the making I found its essence. Working within the contextual format of the arches I found a personal definition of what my work could be. My experiences in carpentry and as an artist have been about the physicality of the materials and process, about skill and craftsmanship and about investigating conceptual interests through these modes of operation.

## THE SCULPTURE

The Bevier Gallery was just over three hundred feet from the outside kiln room. Access to and from the gallery was not difficult. Therefore the arches could be carried and placed on the wall. Since I had already incorporated the mounting system during fabrication I had some flexibility regarding their exact location. Spacing was important in that I wanted the inner curve of each arch visible from the largest to the smallest with its glass liner. I felt this alignment unified the arches into one sculpture.

My thesis work was titled "Transitions" and came to consist of seven out of the ten original arches. The west wall of the Bevier Gallery is 35 feet long with the arches taking 24 feet of that dimension. Each arch is spaced at intervals of 4 feet. The largest one (#1) has a radius of 8 feet. It is the most organic in terms of texture and form. Hemp fibers included in the polymer adobe along with the rough trowel marks give it an almost tree or root like quality. As the arch ends on the floor its shape begins to shift, to narrow and elongate, corresponding with the beginning of #2. The second arch has a radius of 7 feet and shifts in cross-section from the end of #1 to the beginning of #3. There is also a shift in materials as the hemp is excluded gradually and a finer, smoother surface quality is appearing. The third arch is uniform from top to bottom and has a radius of 6 feet. It is 16 inches in depth and tapers to a fine edge on both the inner and outer curve. No variations in form along its length give it a sense of completion or the end of a cycle. The fourth arch (#4) starts at the top with this thin, rib-like appearance only to shift to a dense, rectangular base. It has a radius of 5 feet. As if to give pause there is no arch at the next interval.



Continuing the sequence, the remaining arches #5, #6, and #7 although decreasing in radius (4, 3, 2 feet) shifted in cross section to a more mechanical, steel beam appearance. As #1- #4 seemed organic and influenced by natural elements #5- #7 are dense, heavy and have a sense of industrial fabrication. The surfaces of these three seem to be slowly oxidizing or rusting. They have clean, curvilinear profiles yet the inner curves contain glass billets cut and shaped to fit. #5 has just a few at its base, while #6 has several more and finally #7 is entirely lined with glass, as if the adobe is the host arch embracing the glass.

I relied on the available lighting in the gallery and the resulting shadows that the arches cast had an important effect. Since the lights were aligned in the same direction the shadows enhanced the interior volume creating a dark, linear negative image on both wall and floor. #5, #6 and #7 were close to an exterior window and the glass inclusions seemed to glow in the interior shadows.



## CONCLUSION

“The world has no room for cowards. We must all be ready somehow to toil, to suffer, to die. And yours is not the less noble because no drum beats before you when you go out into your daily battlefields, and no crowds shout about your coming when you return from your daily victory or defeat.”

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94)

I am still left with the memory of how far my physical and intellectual capabilities were pushed by the thesis work. It was an experience that did dovetail the past experiences of carpentry with my concepts as an artist. I was able to combine non-related materials or systems to make the thesis body of work and still remain in the context of being a ceramic artist. The cumulative effect of the thesis is that it changed how I think and work as both a ceramic artist and as an artist interested in working in a variety of materials. I think it is a valid pursuit that I explore how my ideas and concepts can manifest through a range of materials that interest me.

The most relevant change to the final presentation of the thesis body of work was my decision to exclude three adobe arches and the final glass arch. Each of the three adobe arches had inclusions of found objects that had some personal reference. The information these objects presented was too literal and distracting. They only served to obscure the presence of the arch. I felt the inclusions did not add any unifying element to the sculpture and in fact broke apart any attempt at order. The solid glass arch was too abrupt an ending for the series. The juxtaposition of adobe and clear glass did not fit with the rest of the arches' materiality. I had come to the point, as an artist, that I could observe and respond to the emotive and intellectual conclusions that not all the arches were going to function as a collective whole. It was possible to distance myself from the

work and edit according to the more formal concerns I had. This awareness was one of the most important results of all my investigations. Associations and resolutions that the thesis experience generated have allowed me to move forward as an artist, and through this new perception explore my interests in formalism and materials.

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Specialty Refractories  
P.O. Box 608  
Mt. Savage MD 21545

Lafarge-Calcium Aluminates, Inc.  
1316 Priority Avenue  
Chesapeake VA 23324

Thermal Foams  
631 Trabold Road  
Rochester NY 14624  
585.247.0324

Dryvitt Primus and Genesis Coatings  
2101 Kenmore Avenue  
Buffalo NY 14207  
Genesis ds417 basecoat  
ultra mesh/ starter reinforcing mesh

American Masonry & Chimney Corp.  
3327 Lake Avenue  
Rochester NY 14612  
585.865.4170

## STABILIZED ADOBE FORMULA

2 parts Dryvitt Genisis polymer cement

3 parts perlite

2 parts coarse sawdust

1 part thermoset microballons

1 handful nylon fibers

1 part kyanite

2 parts coarse grog

1 part fine grog

2 parts goldart

1 part redart

2 parts fire clay

Add to dry mix; red iron, yellow iron, kyanite, burnt umber, yellow ocher and mason stains usually 2-4% of batch depending on color needed

### Sealer

1 part acrylic sealer

1 part water resistant carpenters glue

1 part water

Apply with spray bottle then sift pigments into wet glue



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## SLIDE LIST

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #1  
2006, measuring and marking the layout of arch segments

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #2  
2006, cutting laminated plywood into arch segments

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #3  
2006, armatures ready to be moved

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #4  
2006, marking the layout of arches for wall cleats

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #5  
2006, wall cleat system

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #6  
2006, wall cleats and floor plates attached on each arch

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slides #7, 8, 9  
2006, laminating and shaping rigid foam board

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #10  
2006, base coat of stabilized adobe

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #11  
2006, applying color coat

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slides #12, 13, 14  
2006, sifting pigments onto color coat

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #15  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 1  
Arches #7-1, stabilized adobe

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #16  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 2  
Arches #1-7, stabilized adobe

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #17  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 3  
Stabilized adobe

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #18  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 4  
Stabilized adobe

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #19  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 5  
Stabilized adobe

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #20  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 6  
Stabilized adobe

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #21  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 7  
Stabilized adobe

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #22  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 8  
Arches #5, 6, 7  
stabilized adobe and glass

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #23  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 9  
Arches #6, 7  
Stabilized adobe and glass

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #24  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery  
Arch #1, stabilized adobe, 96 inch radius

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #25  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery  
Arch #1, stabilized adobe, 96 inch radius



Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #26  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery  
Arch #2, stabilized adobe, 84 inch radius

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #27  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery  
Arch #3, stabilized adobe, 72 inch radius

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #28  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery  
Arch #3, stabilized adobe, 72 inch radius

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #29  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery  
Arch #4, stabilized adobe, 60 inch radius

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #30  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery  
Arches #5, 6, 7, stabilized adobe and glass  
Arch #5 has a 48 inch radius

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #31  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery  
Arches #6, stabilized adobe and glass, 36 inch radius

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slide #32  
2006, Transitions  
Bevier Gallery, view 1  
Arches #7, stabilized adobe and glass, 24 inch radius

Kevin Mulcahy                      Slides #33-36  
2006, Transitions  
One of the arches that was later omitted  
Stabilized adobe and found objects, 108 inch radius



KEVIN MULCAHY #1



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #2



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #3



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #4



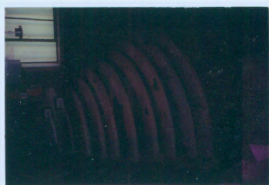
TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #5



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #6



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #7



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #8



TRANSITIONS '06

TRANSITIONS #9



KEVIN MULCAHY '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #10



TRANSITIONS '06

TRANSITIONS #11



KEVIN MULCAHY '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #12



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #13



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #14



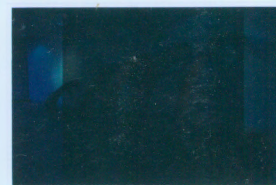
TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #15



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #16



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #17



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #18



TRANSITIONS '06

KEVIN MULCAHY #19



TRANSITIONS '06

TRANSITIONS #20



KEVIN MULCAHY '06



KEVIN MURPHY #21



TRANSITIONS 06

KEVIN MURPHY #22



TRANSITIONS 06

KEVIN MURPHY #23



TRANSITIONS 06

KEVIN MURPHY #24



TRANSITIONS 06

96" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #25



TRANSITIONS 06

96" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #26



TRANSITIONS 06

84" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #27



TRANSITIONS 06

72" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #28



TRANSITIONS 06

72" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #29



TRANSITIONS 06

60" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #30



TRANSITIONS 06

#5 - 48" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #31



TRANSITIONS 06

36" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #32



TRANSITIONS 06

24" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #33



TRANSITIONS 06

108" RADIUS

KEVIN MURPHY #34



TRANSITIONS 06

KEVIN MURPHY #35



TRANSITIONS 06

KEVIN MURPHY #36



TRANSITIONS 06